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GOOD GOVERNANCE, GOOD BUSINESS AND GOOD SOCIETY – WHERE IT STANDS OR FALLS

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It is rather ironic how we all hope to have a good life, good body, good mind and good spirit; and we want to function in a good society. And yet, most of the time we are unwilling to take an honest look in the mirror and do the needed work on ourselves to improve our body, mind, and most of all, spirit. In order to be 'good' -- and experience this goodness -- it often requires introspection and lots of hard work on the right things. 'Good' does not fall out of the sky...and you may have a much better chance winning a lottery.

Looking back for perspective

The Queter in Ecclesiastes 7: 10 advises: *Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.* So let us not fall into that trap. However, for perspective, looking back in history can be useful. It is important to get a sense of how our collective story unfolded over years, decades and centuries. It may help us understand some of our predicaments in modern societies.

Today, most societies are characterised by the principles of democracy and the free market. It directs the social order and culture of doing things. If in the past it were philosophies, religious doctrine, science and political ideologies that were the major elements of influence in how people lead their lives, then today it is the economy, and more specifically a capitalist and free market economy. One might say the energy that propelled the changes across the globe in recent decades was the ongoing lure of the emancipation and freedom of the individual. There was -- and still is -- a lot of good in the story; however people who are willing to keep a balanced perspective of the past will largely agree that today we are suffering from different ailments, and we have lost much of the foundations we have built on in the past.

In the early days of capitalism, the moral framework of the local community informed, and guarded, behaviour in the marketplace. People in business, as much as in any other sector of society, did their daily work conscious of the religious directions for all of life. Whilst in the mind of Adam Smith (1723-1790) -- the father of capitalist economics -- he believed self-interest drove productivity and ultimately the economy. The counterweight to greed in Smith's thinking was the moral virtues learned at home and in religious communities. The argument, in other words, was that if good people do business, they would know where to draw the line.

Of course, the world today looks very different to what it was in Smith's time. The 'heart' of the world economy is found within the mega-cities and in the virtual global transactions. What is left of small like-minded moral communities is insignificant in terms of their influence on a rapidly developing world culture where the virtues of 'goodness' seem less important.

Rapidly changing, and differing values

Moral formation in the way it happened in the 18th century -- which is still evident in some smaller communities today -- occurred mostly through peer pressure and under the watchful eye of revered religious authorities. Times and circumstances have changed and relying upon the moral guidance of a community or its leaders, as was the case in a former era, is at best no longer dependable. In the times we currently live -- more specifically in the workplace -- ethics and moral behavior is guided mostly by the values espoused through a glossy Integrated Report, or a framed statement of intent found in the visitor's reception. Of course, for ethics in the workplace to be authentic, it needs to be lived through the organisation's leadership, and not only recorded in a



charter or policy. Said more directly, leadership must show the will and commitment toward the improvement of a better working environment which satisfies the principles addressed in the King Report on Governance for South Africa 2009 ('King III'), and such where this is demonstrated on a daily basis through application.

The world community today interconnects and integrates across both physical and mental frameworks at an astonishing and still accelerating pace. As people enter the endless world of information, products, services and cultural practices, they are influenced in many different ways. To this end, the *sole judge* of what is good, bad, allowable or not allowable rests with the individual. Given the extent of the many variables, it's little wonder we experience a decline of social ethics – no one particular view of morality can be imposed on a pluralistic society. Whether we read the newspapers or watch the news, or witness workplace malpractices, many people may feel the need to question the essence of our moral foundation. No matter where one looks, there is a growing perception that corruption and greed is taking over the world.

Responsible leaders

Most people would agree that when an adult reaches the age of say fifty, most things in that person's life will have changed, and in some cases rather dramatically. But one of the things which have not changed since the birth of humanity is the inherent call of leadership, such that the leader becomes a role model to others. The bigger the scope of responsibility, the more influential and significant is the example lived by the leader. We all live with a level of responsibility, at least towards ourselves, but also towards others and our home - planet earth. How we interpret that responsibility in the world as we know it today, is more up to the individual than ever before. In this sense, we all need to embrace the idea that we need to 'grow' the leader and leader qualities in ourselves. That is to take full responsibility for body, mind and spirit, living and growing the good potential that was created in us. That said, those in society who are entrusted with formal leadership positions have an immense responsibility, but above all, they must set an example of character infused with integrity. In business terms this is the essence of good governance which is espoused in King III, and it states clearly that good governance is essentially about good leadership, good discipline and such that these qualities are applied consistently at all times.

Deeper levels of thinking and awareness

We find ourselves in the unfortunate position that leadership has in many instances been reduced to not much more than a set of skills to 'play the economic game'; detached from any emotional connection to the cause and the people of the organisation. Chief executives are often shifting from one lucrative position to another, with short-term contracts focused only on improving the figures in the balance sheet in the quickest possible time. What are the chances of these executives having a character-building influence on the employees of the organisation and its culture? Bolman and Deal in their book *Leading with Soul* encapsulate our experience well:

'We move from fad to fad without putting our heart fully into anything. It is not surprising that we feel powerless in the face of so many social and organisational ills. Beneath our helplessness is a spiritual vacuum. It saps our faith, weakens our heart, and leaves us foundering.'

And Thomas Merton reminds us that more activity will not fill the vacuum:

'Our being is not to be enriched merely by activity or experience as such. Everything depends on the quality of our acts and our experiences. A multitude of badly performed actions and of experiences only half-lived exhausts and depletes our being. By doing things badly we make ourselves less real.'

Good governance, good business and a (good) well-balanced society stand or fall in the heart, mind and conscience of the leader. It requires deeper levels of thinking and awareness. As Otto Scharmer's U-theory



suggests, there is a need to go beyond downloading patterns of the past to an open mind, open heart and open will (my whole being has slowed down. I feel more quiet and present and more my real self. I am connected to something larger than myself). It requires dedicated 'time-out' time for contemplation. Moreover, the most crucial and empowering step, and particularly so for leaders, is to focus on one or a few persons whom they believe they can serve with the best they have to offer about what is *good, meaningful and eternal*. One way of achieving this could be, as an example, becoming a life mentor to someone. The more a person is willing to mentor someone, the higher will be the standards they will set for themselves. And the higher these standards are set by the mentor, the better they will live as an example for all to see and follow. When a person is willing to avail themselves to this unselfish act of subservient leadership, only then will we be able to transform our work organisations into 'communities', rich in meaningful and caring relationships and with passion for the cause. Only then will we experience more of what is real and good.

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The CGF leadership development process is built on the above-stated views. It includes the following: The heartstyles assessment (www.heartstyles.com), the 32 leadership principles online programme (www.newlead.co.za/corporate-offering), individual coaching and group learning facilitation.

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